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ME ASPECTS

OF WOMAN'S LIFE.





SOME ASPECTS OF WOMAN'S
LIFE.

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SOME ASPECTS OF WOMAN'S LIFE.

Five Lenten Addresses

BY

ROWLAND ELLIS, M.A.

VICAR OF MOLD AND RURAL DEAN.

Published under the Direction of the Tract Committee.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following Addresses were delivered in substance in Mold Parish Church on Wednesday mornings during Lent, to a congregation, for the most part, made up of women ; they have since been rewritten from notes, and are now published in deference to the wishes of some of those who heard them.

The object aimed at in their delivery was to enforce certain plain and practical duties, which come within the scope of woman's life, as well as to guard against those dangers which, in an age of feverish restlessness, may be said to beset many, who, while desiring to serve God, yet through want of method and definiteness of purpose, fail to carry out their desires.

It is not an easy matter to say to whom one is indebted for many of the thoughts that occur in such addresses ; thoughts are from time to time received, they become assimilated, they are

unconsciously reproduced, but whence they originally came it is difficult to say.

I am deeply conscious of the many imperfections of these addresses, but as I believe them to have been of help to some of those who heard them, I now send them forth with an earnest prayer that they may be found equally useful to others, who are striving to serve God amid the distractions of the world.

R. E.

THE VICARAGE, MOLD,
May 22nd, 1881.

CONTENTS.

ADDRESS I.

RUTH, OR DECISION OF CHARACTER.

RUTH i. 18.

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| <i>"Stedfastly minded to go with her"</i> | 9 |

ADDRESS II.

MARTHA, OR HOUSEHOLD CARES.

ST. LUKE x. 41.

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>"Careful and troubled about many things"</i> | 23 |
|---|----|

ADDRESS III.

EUNICE, OR THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN.

2 TIMOTHY i. 5.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| <i>"Thy mother Eunice"</i> | 39 |
|--------------------------------------|----|

ADDRESS IV.

PHŒBE, OR THE DISTRICT VISITOR.

ROMANS xvi. 1.

PAGE

*"I commend unto you Phæbe our sister, which is a
servant of the Church which is at Cenchrea"* . 58

ADDRESS V.

THE VIRGIN MARY, OR TRUE BLESSEDNESS.

ST. LUKE i. 48.

*"Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call
me blessed"* 79

SOME ASPECTS OF WOMAN'S LIFE.

ADDRESS I.

RUTH, OR DECISION OF CHARACTER.

"Stedfastly minded to go with her."—RUTH i. 18.

WOMAN has always acted an important part in the history of this world. From the time of Eve down to the present her position has always been a responsible one. There have been women who have occupied high stations in life, and in those stations have wielded tremendous power for good or for evil, and there have been women in the lower strata of society whose examples have to a marvellous extent helped to form and mould the tone of the locality in which they lived. Woman's influence wherever she is, in whatever sphere of life she moves, is untold. Has it never occurred to you in reading the history of the kings

of Israel and Judah—where it is said of certain kings who had done good or evil in the sight of the Lord, that the mother's name was so and so—has it never occurred to you to ask why the mother's name should be mentioned at all? Can we think of any reason for this? May it not be to remind us that, in the moulding and fashioning of the characters of those kings, the mother's influence had been an all important factor; if the king was a good man, his mother had helped to make him so, if on the other hand the king turned out badly, his evil course might for the most part be traced back to his mother's training or neglect of training?

Again we find in the history of the world that when a woman comes prominently before us, whether it be in connection with what is good or evil, there is a *thoroughness* about her that is often wanting in the opposite sex. For example, when a woman gives way to evil habits, she sinks low indeed; if a woman takes sides in politics or religion, she does not do it generally by halves, she becomes a thorough partisan. Or again, if she takes in hand some philanthropic object, how

thoroughly she will set about it, with what vigour she will carry it out, what zeal, what devotion, what patience and perseverance she will display in bringing it to a successful termination! History both sacred and secular is full of instances shewing how women by the force of their character, the strength of their will, have done almost incredible things. Nay! take our Holy Religion itself. Look at its commencement in the world. When its Great Founder Himself was here upon earth, where did He meet with the greatest sympathy, the greatest devotion? It was at the hands of women. See Him in His last great agony, when His disciples have forsaken Him and fled; who are those who are seen standing near His Cross? They are the faithful women who have followed Him. Or stand near the Tomb on the first Easter morn; who are those that are seen approaching very early as it begins to dawn? They are "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary."

Seeing then the prominence which woman occupies in connection with the history of our race, the vast power that she wields for good or for evil in moulding the destinies of mankind;

seeing also how constantly her work and influence are portrayed in the Sacred Scriptures, I have ventured to select a few female characters out of the many that are there brought before us, in order that we might, during this Lent, dwell upon them, and having dwelt upon them, carry away with us, by God's Grace, some lessons that may be profitable to our own souls.

The character that I have chosen for our contemplation this morning is *Ruth*, as exemplifying *Decision*, and I think you will agree with me that in the short history of Ruth we have one of the most beautiful pictures that are painted on the sacred canvas of Holy Writ.

Let us look at the whole scene as it is graphically set forth by the sacred writer. In the background of the picture we see Elimelech the Jew, with his wife Naomi and their two sons. They have come into the country of Moab in consequence of a severe famine in the land of Israel. It was not perhaps a God-fearing course to take. It shewed a want of confidence in Him, who had always been with their fathers, to leave the country where He had placed them, and to seek sustenance

among a people with whom He had forbidden them to hold intercourse. And what is the result of this act? First of all trouble for himself and his family. Fleeing from death, as he thought, he only went to meet death in a strange land. The first and only record that we have of him is this brief epitaph: "And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left, and her two sons."

Nor was this all. The first false step led to another. The two sons took unto themselves wives of the daughters of Moab, of whom God had said, "Thou shalt not make marriages with them." They, too, in a short time both died, and the mother is not only bereaved of her husband, but also of both her sons. It is a brief but sad history—distrust, then disobedience, then death, unlawful marriages, then two other deaths, and Naomi is left alone in a land where idolatry is the only religion.

That is the background of the picture: in the foreground stands Ruth the Moabitess. She and her sister Orpah, both bereaved of their husbands, are now seen administering comfort and succour to their desolate mother-in-law. It seems that this

lone widow from the land of Israel had gained a wonderful influence over the hearts of her young daughters-in-law. Probably her calm endurance, her firm trust and confidence in One of Whom they were ignorant, had inspired them with a strange liking for her, and they clung to her with all the affection of their hearts.

It was a dark hour, therefore, for Ruth and Orpah when Naomi, hearing that the famine was no longer in the land of Israel, intimated that she intended to return to Bethlehem-Judah. No more would they listen to her words, no more would they be attracted by the fascination of her character, no more would they hear of that strange and chosen people, of the invisible God and His wonderful acts. Naomi was returning, and they would again be thrown back upon themselves, left to return to their old ways. Surely it cannot be! It must not be! No! they will return with her. They have been a solace to one another in their great trouble, and they must not part from her now. Accordingly they both set out to accompany her. They both follow her, probably to the confines of the land of Israel, and then the aged mother-in-law

entreats them to go back. At first *both* the sisters resist her entreaties. It does not appear that Orpah differed from Ruth in her affection for Naomi; both loved her deeply, but it was Ruth who had within her the power to enable her to break through every barrier, for when Naomi a second time and at greater length implored her daughters-in-law to return, it is at this time that we see the difference between the two. It is at this time that the character of Ruth stands forth so strong and beautiful. "Orpah," the sacred writer tells us, "kissed her mother-in-law and departed, but Ruth clave unto her." Orpah is persuaded to go back; her heart is not quite weaned from the world; she "halts between two opinions," and when it comes to the final decision, she decides to go back to Moab and her idols. But Ruth bravely withstands every temptation, and when Naomi a third time entreated her to go back, this additional entreaty only strengthened her firm resolution to go on. She had "put her hand to the plough," and she would not look back. It has been well said that, "there is scarcely an instance in the whole of Scripture of

firmness and decision on a trying occasion more triumphant than this." It was the firm resolve of one who knew that to go on was the only method by which she could satisfactorily solve the great problem of her life. Naomi had opened her eyes to a new vision. She had given her a glimpse of better things, and she could not now rest satisfied until she had seen more. "Entreat me not," she said, "to leave thee or to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge, thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Words most beautiful in themselves, and endeared to many of us by their sweet musical rendering. Here indeed is a character of no mean order. Two paths present themselves to her: the question is, "Shall I turn this way or that?" but there is no hesitation. Ruth has made up her mind. She has chosen the good part. She has decided for God.

And was her choice a vain one? Oh, no! The sequel of the story tells us how she was rewarded. She went in search of spiritual blessings and she found temporal as well; and not

only this, but there is a far more significant mark of God's favour exemplified in this narrative. In the history of Ruth we have an important link in the genealogy of our Saviour. Boaz, descended from Pharez, begat Obed of Ruth, Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David. Thus Ruth, a gentile became one of the ancestors of the Prince of Peace, a foreshadowing of that time when all the Gentiles should know Him, and all the earth bow down before Him.

We see, then, in Ruth, an example of *decision*. How necessary is this quality for each one of us as we pass through this world!

I. Necessary first of all even in temporal things. Surely there is no character more unsatisfactory than an undecided person, a person whom the slightest gust of popular opinion changes. You find her one day pursuing one course of action, and evidently taking an interest in what she is doing, but by the next day something or other has occurred, or she has listened to some gossip, and her plans are altogether changed. You cannot depend upon her. She attempts many things but effects nothing. She

is ready at once to enter into any new scheme that is projected, and as ready to back out of it; she has no steadfastness of purpose, not enough force of character to make up her mind and abide by her decision.

Oh! how much mischief is caused in the world by undecided persons! They do not mean it, nevertheless the mischief is done, and they are to blame. An undecided parent! a fickle, vacillating mother! what a world of misery in after life does such a mother often bring upon her children! At one time foolishly petting them and humouring them, at another unnecessarily exacting in her demands, now saying one thing, now another; never firm, never decided. How can you possibly expect the children of such a mother to grow up with that strength of character, that manliness which one so loves to see in the rising generation? If they do, it will not be in consequence of their training, but in spite of it. An undecided mistress again, what a world of worry and annoyance, to say the least of it, must such an one cause to her domestics! She orders and counter-orders, she makes ar-

rangements and then without any rhyme or reason alters them. There is no punctuality, no order, no rule; things are allowed to take care of themselves: which of course means a state of hopeless confusion.

II. But if *indecision* is ruinous in temporal matters, what must we say of it when applied to our spiritual and eternal concerns! Dear friends! indecision here is nothing less than madness. An undecided Christian is the greatest of all anomalies. If the Bible be true (and we acknowledge it to be true), if what God says about seeking "first His kingdom and His righteousness," if His declaration regarding the utter impossibility of serving "God and mammon," if what he He has told us about the necessity of making our choice at once, if these things, I say, be true (and we know them to be true), what shall we say of those who are for ever "halting between two opinions," who have not as yet heartily responded to God's love, who have not as yet taken the first steps towards a real thorough heart surrender to Him, who profess and call themselves Christians, but are for ever calculating how little of the outward

veneer of Christianity will enable them to maintain this profession before the world, who cannot make up their minds to give up God, and yet, like the poor silly moth, are for ever fluttering around the flickering lights of this world, who are Christ's in name but the world's in practice? Oh! surely! if decision is needed anywhere it is here, where the interests of our immortal souls are at stake. Indecision here has been rightly compared to indecision in escaping from a burning house, or from a sinking ship; it is utter ruin.

But perhaps you will tell me that I am not speaking to-day to undecided persons in this sense; you have made your choice, you were placed in the great family of Christ by Holy Baptism, you came at the time of your Confirmation and you publicly declared that you belonged to Him, and ever since that time by various acts, more especially when you have knelt at His Holy Altar, you have shown again and again your deep love to Him. Oh! I trust that it is so; I believe that it is so with many of you, but we must be on our guard; it is so easy to deceive ourselves, so easy to think that we

are serving God, when at best perhaps He only gets from us a divided allegiance, only half our hearts, perhaps not always even the half.

Assuming that we have all set out in right earnest on the narrow way that leadeth to life, that we are all sincere in our desire to serve the Master Christ, we are not on this account to be over confident. "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." I need not tell you that as you pass on along this narrow way you must expect to meet with difficulties of a peculiar kind. There is not one who has gone a day's journey without coming as it were to a place where two roads meet, and without being confronted by the question, "Shall I go this way or that? Shall I adopt this course or that? Shall I do this thing or leave it undone? Shall I turn aside or shall I go straight on?" Are not these the kind of questions that we have to face continually as we journey on; and what is it that we need? Is it not *Decision*? Ah! but dare we always trust our own judgment? What if it leads us astray? What if by turning down one road instead of another we are led on

and on to loss and ruin, and destruction of soul and body? what if by taking one false step, speaking one unguarded word, indulging one evil thought, a whole lifetime be rendered miserable, perhaps more than a lifetime—an eternity? What is it then that we need at such a time as this? Oh! is it not the promised guidance of God the Holy Ghost? We have to decide, it may be, to decide instantly: on our decision everything depends: the moment is a most critical one. What shall we do? send up a prayer, a short ejaculatory prayer like a winged arrow to God for help, that in deciding we may decide aright.

Yes: day by day, as we journey on, we may have again and again to decide on some point bearing on our own souls or on the souls of others. Let it always be our one aim to decide according to the Will of God, and in order that we may do so, let us pray earnestly that God's good Spirit may guide our decision!

ADDRESS II.

MARTHA, OR HOUSEHOLD CARES.

'Careful and troubled about many things.'—ST. LUKE
x. 41.

IT is in the little village of Bethany that our thoughts are to find a resting place this morning. It was often the resting place of Jesus towards the close of His earthly ministry, that quiet hamlet so near Jerusalem, and yet completely cut off from its din and turmoil by the intervening summit of Olivet. It was here in this secluded spot, just two miles distant from the site of that glorious temple in which Solomon, ages before, had asked in wonder and amazement, "Shall God in very deed dwell with man upon the earth? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, how much less this house that I have built!" It was here, in a far humbler dwelling than the house which Solomon built, that God Incarnate often and often found a home.

It was "the town of Mary and her sister Martha," and nowhere perhaps did Jesus spend more peaceful, more happy hours than He did with that little household at Bethany—that household consisting just of three persons, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Some seem to think that Martha was the eldest of the family, and that she was a widow at this time, but whether this be so or not we cannot tell for certain. It seems however as if she acted as the head, the mistress of that little household, and a very happy, contented and united household it seems to have been. It *must* have been this, to have been a home for Jesus, amid the buffetings and contradictions of a world that was rejecting Him. Surely the Man of Sorrows found a home not only beneath this sheltering roof, but also in the hearts of the inmates. He was evidently drawn to them by the loveliness of their character, for the Evangelist tells us, with touching pathos, that "Jesus *loved* Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." We can easily picture to ourselves the quiet evenings spent in that happy home, the calm repose after a day of weariness and toil. It must

have been like a real oasis in the desert to that burdened human heart of His.

It was on one of these occasions that we have especially brought before us the characters of the two sisters, probably it was at the time of the Feast of Dedication. We read that Jesus had entered to be their Guest—Martha served, but Mary sat at His feet and listened to His words.

Here we have delineated as it were by a few clear, well-defined strokes the special feature in the life of each of these sisters. Martha's was the active life, Mary's the contemplative life. Martha was "cumbered about much serving," Mary took her position at the Master's feet. There was nothing blameworthy in the conduct of Mary: no doubt her sister dearly loved to manage the affairs of the household; it was in accord with her active, energetic disposition to do so, and so Mary, of a more sensitive and retiring mind, naturally gave way. It was no doubt her constant habit to do so, and on this occasion while Martha, anxious to do full honour to her guest, was hurrying to and fro preparing the meal,

Mary equally anxious to honour Him, was also showing her affection but in a different way.

Nor was there anything blameworthy in itself in this activity of Martha—it was the outward expression of her deep love to Jesus. What was wrong in her conduct was that in the midst of this bustling activity she was rather hard on her sister, she spoke in a somewhat censorious tone of her; there is a touch of vexation in her words when she appeals to Jesus and asks Him to interfere in the matter: she is grieved at what she considers as want of thought on the part of her sister.

But Jesus in answer to this appeal—the gentle Jesus, loving both and equally grateful to both—had only the tenderest reply. His rebuke to Martha was a very loving one, a very considerate one. There is a tone almost of playfulness, if I may with reverence use the word, about it. “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” Here is Martha’s character faithfully, yet lovingly and tenderly

pourtrayed, "careful and troubled about many things." The words in the Greek seem to have a peculiar meaning; the word which we translate "careful"¹ seems rather to allude to her "inward anxiety," and the word which we translate "troubled"² to her "outward fussiness." It has been said³ "that if we were to use colloquial terms, '*fretting*' and '*fussing*' would exactly represent the two words." It is this disposition that Jesus so gently reproves—this *over-anxiety*. It is the same expression that He uses when He says elsewhere, "Take no thought," i.e. no *anxious* "thought for the morrow." "Thou art anxious," He says, about *many* things," whereas but *one* thing is needful. It seems that an Eastern meal consisted of one common dish, and it may be that our Blessed Lord, as was so often his wont, caught hold of this feature in an earthly meal to enforce a higher and spiritual lesson. Only one thing, He said, is really needful and "Mary hath chosen that good part." Martha had not done

¹ μεριμνήσ.

² τυρβάλλη: see Dr. Farrar's "Life of Christ," vol. ii. p. 143.

³ *ibid.*

wrong in serving, but Mary's was the better portion.

And so, dear friends, we have here before us this morning the characters of these two sisters described by the Son of God Himself; the one representing a life of active service, the other a life of calm inward devotion. The Church needs both, she cannot do without the one any more than the other. Perhaps the most perfect life is that which combines both kinds of service—active work and inward devotion. It is the life of the holy angels, nay more it was the life of the Master Himself when here on earth.

But it is with the character of Martha that we have now more especially to do, and that not merely in the legitimate development of its activity, but also in that phase of it which our Lord gently reproved. I mean the over-anxious, fussy, fretful side of it. Martha has, we know, become quite a household word, and any woman who may seem to display more than ordinary anxiety in domestic matters is said to be a "*Martha*:" at the same time perhaps she may altogether lack the good qualities of Martha and

the motives which influenced Martha. There are we know in the world persons in whom this phase of character is unduly developed. Let us look at a few of them and try and see what the remedy is.

I. There is the *fussy* person. This is a character which most of us have come across at one time or other. She is generally a kind person, often intensely kind, and not infrequently it is this very kindness, the desire to please everybody, the wish to be everywhere, and if it were only possible, to be everywhere at one and the same time, it is this that is at the root of her troubles. She gets distracted, she does not know what to turn to first, things are not arranged and pigeon-holed, so to speak, in the chambers of her mind, everything is a jumble, she does not know what to bring out first. There is no method, and consequently things get in each other's way. With the best intentions in the world she fails to accomplish her object. Duties that ought to be done at a given time are not done at that time, and of course if done at some other time they throw something else out of gear, and so the whole

machinery of her daily life gets into a state of hopeless and helpless confusion. There is a great deal of fuss but very little work, a great deal of useless haste but very little real speed.

Now what is the remedy for this state of things? Is it not to try and do what we have to do by rule, and not by impulse? Do we not find that we often lose more time, and that we actually get through less work, when we do things at random, than when we arrange matters beforehand, and carry out our plans systematically and methodically? Surely then it is a good thing to have a general plan, as far as we can make one, for each day. I say a *general* plan because it may not always be possible to carry out strictly every detail, but let there be as far as possible some plan. Of course there will be a fixed time for getting up each morning—for prayer, private, family, and public. Nothing short of absolute necessity must interfere with our devotions, for it is at these times of communion with God that we learn that calm quiet confidence which we so much need; it is then by sitting at the feet of Jesus that we get that strength which counteracts

fussiness and over-anxiety. There will also be the fixed time for each meal in the day and this should, as far as possible, be strictly adhered to. Each duty will have its own particular place and its own particular time. Of course I need not say that punctuality in the performance of each portion of our work is an absolute necessity. Let everything be regulated in this way—even our recreations, our amusements—and it will be a wonderful help in counteracting that distraction of mind, that hurrying hither and thither which active persons, who work without any system or method, must almost of necessity fall into. I know it may be asked, “Is not this fussiness a part of some persons’ temperament, how can they help it?” and people sometimes excuse themselves for some bad habit or other into which they have glided by saying “It is my nature, I cannot help myself.” Yes! but our tempers are said to be “instruments of discipline,” and Holy Scripture abounds in instances where the Grace of God earnestly responded to has triumphed over natural dispositions and brought them into complete subjection, and if so, why should not

those who are naturally of a fussy temperament be brought by the same grace into a state of calm, collected, methodical diligence in well doing. The Grace of God is all-powerful, but we must act in conjunction with it, we must not resist it.

II. Then again there is the person who is of a *fretful* disposition. Household troubles, home cares are sometimes a heavy trial to many. Many suffer intensely, owing to little every day worries. It is not great troubles so much that try them—these can often be met—but it is the continual succession, the “perpetual dropping” of little annoyances. Many a one has braced herself up to bear courageously and without wincing some *great*, some *crushing* trouble; she has bowed her head calmly and resignedly and said “Thy will be done;” and yet in the face of those *little trifling* every day worries she gives way; she is thrown off her balance, there is loss of temper, there is fretfulness, repining, so injurious to the spiritual life. Surely the best way to deal with these trifling worries is to regard them as means of discipline, and so to profit by them. They occur continually, they are like

prickly, troublesome thorns, of which life is full. Sometimes they occur through one's own fault or folly, sometimes through the faults of others. You speak a thoughtless or hasty word and an angry answer is given back, or there has been an act of carelessness on the part of your child or servant, something has been broken or lost—such a trifle—but it has worried and annoyed you, it has tried your temper. Now these little trials should be turned to good account, for it is by practising self-denial in these little matters, it is by daily overcoming what are called little faults and persevering in little efforts after holiness, that the spiritual life advances onwards towards perfection.

One good rule to make is this—to resolve not to dwell on little annoyances. How often do persons brood over some disagreeable event, until what was at first a mere molehill easily removed has been magnified into a mountain! “We rub a gnat bite,” it has been said, “till it swells into a lump, and we talk of an affront until it is inflamed and magnified beyond measure.”

Another great help is to think constantly of

D

the way in which Jesus acted under similar circumstances, and so, running the race set before us, look unto Him. Never was any one tried as He was. Think of the worries that he must have passed through—the questionings of the Pharisees with their mean, little, carping jealousies, the cavillings of the Sadducees, and yet He never lost His temper, so calm was He throughout, so gentle, passing through all without murmuring, “perfect through suffering.” Let us dwell on this lovely character. It will often help us when we are tempted to give way beneath the little worries of life.

III. But I pass on, for I must not forget that as we journey through the wilderness there are to be met *real* troubles, great troubles, crushing troubles, troubles before which these daily household cares, these little daily worries, that we often think so much of, fade into utter insignificance. There are the cares of those who find it hard, with all their efforts, with all their struggles, to make both ends meet. This is often a heavy trouble to many. Many a one has been tempted again and again to give up hope and

to say "It is no use my trying, all things seem to be against me."

Again there are those troubles which come when sickness, perhaps long lingering sickness, enters a household, and you have to watch the loved one day by day becoming weaker and weaker, with all hope of recovery taken away. Then there is the great crushing trouble when death enters, when the home becomes desolate, the household is broken up and friends are scattered.

But perhaps of all trials and troubles none can be greater than that of a godly wife living with an utterly irreligious husband. Imagine the wife consecrating herself, body, soul, and spirit, to the service of Christ, and the partner of her life giving himself up, body, soul, and spirit, to the service of the devil. This is indeed a trial, and the better Christian the wife is, the more must she feel it. The more earnestly she follows Christ herself, the more must she yearn for her husband's conversion. This is, I think, one of the greatest of all trials. When we lay the bodies of our faithful departed ones in their last

resting place, we lay them there "in sure and certain hope," but as for those who are dead while they live, "dead in trespasses and sins" oh! how lamentable is their case! how wide the gulf which separates the servants of God from those who serve him not!

IV. But in speaking of troubles there is one trouble more that I must mention. Dear friends! do our *sins* never cause us any trouble? Oh! I am sure if we truly realize what sin is—how God regards it, what it cost Him to atone for it, when we think how often we sin, how slowly we seem to overcome those sins that so easily beset us, how prone we are to yield to temptation; if we think of these things at all I am sure they must again and again cause us much trouble.

Now what are we to do with these troubles, these cares, these sorrows? are we to brood over them and let them make us utterly miserable? Nay! let us take them to the throne of grace, let us tell them in the ears of our Father Which is in heaven. Does not He tell us to "cast all our care upon Him?" yes *all* our care. Does not He assure us that "He careth for us?" Yes

for *us*, for you, for me, separately and individually. It is personal, individual care. Take the life of our Lord Jesus Christ when here on earth! He loved the multitude, but He loved them because they were made up of separate individual souls. He had His eye on each separate soul, and He loved that soul as though it alone existed in the Universe. See Him on one occasion proceeding to the house of Jairus, the crowd presses and throngs Him as He proceeds, yet a poor woman comes behind and touches the hem of His garment; the touch is not perceived by others, but Jesus perceives it and His attention is at once concentrated on that poor woman; He deals with her as if she alone stood before Him.

Yes! personal, individual care! "He careth for *thee*." What does your Baptism mean? does it not mean, in one of its aspects, the applying to each one separately the blessings which Christ by His death purchased for all mankind. Yes! "He careth for *thee*." Oh, burdened and heavily laden soul! often sorely tried by the worries and annoyances of life, sometimes weighed down,

perhaps almost crushed by its heavier troubles, constantly burdened by the load of thy sins, what art thou to do? Why, cast all thy care upon Him! He bids thee do so, He yearns to relieve thee of thy burden, and He will do so, if thou wilt only let Him.

Yes, Blessed Jesus! Thou assurest me of Thy succour, therefore day by day I will come to Thee.

“Bringing all my burdens,
Sorrow, sin, and care,
At Thy feet I lay them,
And I leave them there.”

ADDRESS III.

EUNICE, OR THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN.

"Thy mother, Eunice."—2 TIMOTHY i. 5.

TO-DAY we are going to speak of a mother, and that a pattern mother. We are going to think of that mother's influence and to try and see what particular lessons we are to learn from it. Mother and child! it is a beautiful picture always—a picture on which we can gaze with interest, and not the least interesting of the pictures of this kind that are painted on the sacred canvas of Holy Writ, is the picture of Eunice and Timothy.

The description that is given of Eunice is a very short one, but in this short description there is enough to shew us what a beautiful character hers must have been. She was a Jewess, we read, who had embraced the Christian religion

probably during St. Paul's former visit to the town in which she lived. She had then evidently been brought under the Apostle's influence, and through that influence had become a convert from Judaism to the faith of Christ.

Let us try and picture to ourselves the home in which this devout woman lived—the home in which Timothy was brought up. Besides the mother and child there is also the father; his name is not given, but we are told that he belonged to a different race. He was a Greek, a Gentile, though it may be perhaps that he too had been brought under the influence of Christianity and had embraced the new religion. Completing, it may be, the little household thus brought before us, there is also the grandmother, Eunice's mother, Lois, and of her, as well as of Eunice, the Apostle writes in terms of high commendation, for in his Second Epistle to Timothy, written shortly before his martyrdom, he calls to remembrance the faith that was not only in Timothy himself, but “which also dwelt first in his grandmother Lois and in his mother Eunice.”

It was in this home that the child Timothy grew and waxed strong; we can picture to ourselves the mother training up her boy "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"—we can imagine her teaching him, from the very time that he could lisp his first word, those Scriptures of the Old Testament which contain the wonderful dealings of God with His people. We can imagine her unfolding to him as he could understand them, little by little, God's precepts and commandments, and leading him step by step to put his whole trust and confidence in Him. "Imagine" did I say? Nay! it is no mere imagination, it is what actually took place. "From a child," St. Paul tells him, "thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." From a child did this pious mother inculcate into him the fear of God—it was "precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little" until he became thoroughly instructed and the Sacred Scriptures became unto him "a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path," and so we may suppose that when Eunice herself embraced the Christian

faith under St. Paul's teaching, Timothy also at the same time passed into the fold of the good Shepherd. Hitherto instructed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament he now passed into the fuller light of the gospel of Christ. This, I say, probably took place during St. Paul's first missionary tour through Asia Minor, for when the Apostle came round the second time, Timothy was already a disciple. And how affectionately does St. Paul speak of him! He calls him his "son in the faith." How lovingly does he write to him! Even his very last utterance to the Church—the Epistle written from his prison house in Rome—is written to Timothy.

So then, dear friends, we see in the life of Timothy what a power for good the influence of a holy mother is! for I want you to bear in mind that St. Paul distinctly attributes Timothy's godly life to those principles of God's Word implanted in his heart through his mother's teaching. I know there are instances, on the one hand, where the children of godly and religious parents have gone astray, and not at all walked in the steps of their parents. I have known

children of most excellent clergymen growing up the very opposite of what one would have expected, like Eli's sons turning out a curse instead of a blessing, and bringing down their parents' grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. These are very sad cases! And there are on the other hand children, who have had ungodly and utterly reprobate parents, children brought up under every disadvantage, neglected and worse than neglected, brought up in homes and localities where there was the *maximum* of temptation with the *minimum* of outward encouragement, and yet by the grace of God these children have grown into earnest, faithful, courageous servants of Christ. But these, you must remember, are for the most part exceptions and not the rule. The old proverb, "train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," is for the most part true: if this rule fails, may we not assume that it is because it is not thoroughly carried out? Where the children of excellent and religious parents grow up badly, we generally find that there is something defective in the education, the bring-

ing up of those children ; it may be that the parents are so busy here and there and everywhere that they find no time to look after that which lies so near home, the spiritual well-being of their own children. They are so full of good works out in the world, that their own household is neglected. And again when we see the opposite phenomenon, viz. the children of ungodly parents turning out well, may we not conclude that there has been some agency counteracting the home bringing up, perhaps the day school, or the Sunday school, or the children's service, or the influence of some kind good district visitor acting on the heart, working effectually by the grace of God's Holy Spirit, and training that child, in spite of its surroundings, for a holy and useful life?

But however this may be, there can be no doubt that generally speaking the mother's influence is an all-important factor in the education of the child. It is impossible to overestimate it. The great Napoleon is said to have asked on one occasion what kind of schools were required for France, and the answer that he received was "Good mothers." He felt this to be so true that

afterwards he used to say, "If I had only the making of the mothers, I should always have good soldiers." And someone else has said that "If you could make all the men good, and leave all the women bad, in the next generation all the men would again be bad." And why is this? It is because the women have the training of the children, and if the children are brought up badly, in the next generation the men and women will be alike bad.

Think for one moment of the sacredness of a mother's vocation. It is her prerogative to watch the very first gleam of intelligence as it dawns in the child, to mark its first smile, to teach it to lisp its first word, to utter its first prayer, to speak to it of God, of Jesus, of heaven. And what if these things be neglected? Oh! I think that the sights that are sometimes seen in the miserable homes—if homes they can be called—that abound in the courts and alleys of our large towns, are enough to make one's heart ache and bleed, where the mother, sunk and degraded, has ceased to think of her child except as a mere machine to be made use of for her own

selfish purpose, or as a target for cuffs and blows : no wonder that the child thus treated should grow up the besotted drunkard, the brutal husband, the cruel father, the curse of his neighbourhood.

But do not go away with the idea that this sin lies altogether with the lower classes ; there are tokens higher up in the scale of social life that the mother's influence is not always what it ought to be. Surely the mother who neglects to instil into her children, as a mother only can do, from their very infancy the principles of the religion of Christ, who leaves this to be done by others or not done at all ; that mother is neglecting a sacred calling ; she is ignoring a solemn trust. Dear sisters ! am I exaggerating when I say that the young ladies of the present day, who fritter away their lives in novel reading and amusements, are to a great extent what they are, because their mothers have not brought them up with higher aims and objects ? Look at the life of a fashionable young lady ! What for the most part is it ? Take one day—a sample of many ! She gets up at a late hour, comes down languidly

to breakfast, reads her letters, skims over the newspapers, dawdles through the morning, or rather what remains of the morning until luncheon. The afternoon is devoted to calls, or to a drive, or a garden party; she returns home, dresses for dinner, which is laboriously gone through, and she dawdles away the rest of the evening until bedtime. Is this, I ask, a life in any real sense of the word for one whom God has endowed with talents and energies to do good in this world of sin and sorrow? And yet, perhaps, it is not so much her fault, as the fault of others who ought to have taught her better. She has capacities for better things; she has perhaps, gifts, but then, it may be, she has not been brought up to exercise these gifts. She has been brought up to conform to the customs of the day, to live for this world only, and to look forward to a rich marriage as the end and aim of her existence. Oh, is not this terrible! I do think it leads often to much unhappiness! A useless, frivolous maidenhood, and then a marriage without love, a marriage without Christ, a marriage of convenience, a marriage for money or position!

What marvel if such bonds are broken! What marvel to see miserable wives, miserable husbands, miserable homes! Oh! it is dreadful, and the most dreadful part of all is to think, that often the instigator has been she who ought to have known better—the mother!

Mother and child! Shall we now try and gather together a few thoughts, a few hints which may, by the grace of God, help the mother to train her child in the right way.

I. Let us begin at the beginning. I assume of course that the Christian mother will bring her child to Christ as soon as she can in His own Sacrament of Baptism. Well, then, having thus brought him to Christ, she must from henceforth regard him as belonging to Christ; she must train him up for Christ. He is now a member of Christ, and the mother must do what she can to bring him up as a true and faithful member. Let her follow in this respect the example of Eunice. Eunice taught Timothy from his very childhood the truth of the Sacred Scriptures, and so let the Christian mother do now. Oh! it is a terrible thing to see parents pampering the

bodies of their children, decking them up in gorgeous apparel, while their souls are destitute, cold, and naked. It is a fearful thing to see the less noble part of man continually thought about and cared for, while the higher and nobler is completely ignored; to think of the vast numbers of those little ones for whom Christ died, for whom He established His Church, who are growing up in this country in ignorance of Him; to think of the thousands of whom Christ must say sorrowfully, "My little ones are destroyed for lack of knowledge;" not indeed through any lack of secular knowledge, we have plenty of that, but through lack of that knowledge which alone can make us "wise unto salvation," the knowledge of God in Christ. I have frequently, in preparing candidates for Confirmation, been surprised and grieved to find, where least expected, an utter ignorance of the very first principles, the very foundation truths of the Christian Religion. Surely this could not possibly occur if all mothers were like Eunice. Christian mothers! see above all things that your little ones, whatever else they may be taught or not taught, are taught

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to know God as their Father, Jesus Christ as their Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost as their Sanctifier.

II. In the next place, the mother should be very careful to set a good example. Even a very little child is sharp enough to detect inconsistencies. What I mean is this, that if the mother wants to train her children in good habits; if she wishes to see them kneeling down and saying their prayers at least every morning and evening; if she wishes them to get into a fixed habit of studying the Scriptures; if she wishes them to be regular and punctual in all that they do, she must herself shew them the way. It is far better to say "come" than "go." Example is far more powerful than precept. The children of godly and religious parents whom example has taught no less than precept are far more likely to lead godly and religious lives than those are, who, though they may have been religiously brought up as far as precept and theory are concerned, have nevertheless been inhaling the infected atmosphere of an evil example.

And with regard to the exercise of authority,

of course there must be discipline; the mother must have her rules; those rules must be enforced, tenderly and lovingly, yet strictly enforced. The child that gets his own way in everything is a child that will grow up to be neither a blessing to himself nor to any one else. Oh! how many ruin the lives of their children by thinking "he is too young to take in this or that lesson; let him have his way now, and in a year or two I will begin to guide him:"—and so the child gets his own way; he must not be thwarted, he must be spoiled and petted; the mother says "it is soon enough to begin to train him;" she lets him defy her authority, and the little child, perchance of three years of age, becomes the master of the household; no one dares to contradict him, his will is law. Christian mothers! take care how you bring up your children in their tender years! Believe me, you cannot begin too early to train them in habits of obedience and subjection to authority.

III. Again, there should be no favouritism. The mother should not make greater favourites of some of her children than of the others. It

has a very bad effect where it is known that the mother has a different treatment for her different children, yet I fear that sometimes it is so. We all know the old proverb that "one man may steal a horse, while another dare not even look through the stable door;" so it sometimes happens in families that one child may go any lengths in mischief, while another dare not move a finger. This is not as it ought to be; the mother ought to treat all her children with fairness and impartiality. And with regard to punishment, if the mother has sometimes to punish her child, let her not punish him when she is angry; I mean, let her not lead the child to suppose that he is punished, not so much because he has done wrong, but because his mother is angry. If a child has to be punished, let him always understand that you are very sorry to have to punish him, but that it is done for his good; in this way the punishment may have a beneficial effect. Encourage your children to confide in you, to come to you with all their little troubles and difficulties; let them feel that you are ready to enter into all their little plans, and that in their mother, at any rate,

they will always find a sympathising listener. Remember that if your children are to be frank and open with you, you must be careful that you do nothing to repel them; that, while you deal firmly with them, you yet deal gently and lovingly.

IV. I will venture to say a word on the subject of Confirmation. I think that the mother can help very much, by assisting her children in their preparation. I often wish we could thoroughly enlist the sympathies of the mothers at this time, it would be such a help; but I am afraid that mothers often send their children to be prepared for Confirmation as a matter of form; they do not help them; and when Confirmation is over and the newly confirmed come to Holy Communion, at first they come at fixed times, but by and by they begin to come irregularly and ere long, it may be, leave off coming altogether. And what is the reason of this? No doubt there are many reasons, but one reason, I feel sure, is often to be found in the fact that the parents do not come themselves and therefore they do not encourage their children to come.

I am not quite sure that they do not sometimes put obstacles in the way of their coming. They say "They are too young." Mark you! they are not too young to be exposed to the snares and pitfalls that surround them in this wicked world, but they are too young to come for strength to enable them to battle with the world, the strength that God conveys through the Ordinances and Sacraments of His Church. Oh, Christian mothers! be examples to your children. Help them; do not hinder them in walking along the narrow, difficult, up-hill "way that leadeth unto life."

V. I will only add one other duty, viz. the duty of the mother to pray for her child. Whatever else she does or neglects to do, let her not neglect this. The child will need her prayers, and Oh! who can estimate the power of the effectual fervent prayer of a pious Christian mother. Some of you know the history of Augustine and Monica. No mother ever saw with greater grief the evil career of a loved son than Monica did that of Augustine. Brought up at Carthage he was thrown into the society of

the sceptical and corrupt: there he fell into evil habits, but his good mother ceased not to pray for him. Through all her grief her prayers were unceasing night and day; importunately did she supplicate the throne of grace, beseeching God to deliver her son from his dangerous errors, and at last she prevailed. The circumstances were these. Augustine had left Carthage for Rome, from Rome he went to Milan, at Milan the famous St. Ambrose presided over the Church of Christ; Augustine went to hear him preach, and while listening to the sermon, the Spirit of God touched him; Jesus laid hold on him, and from that time may be dated the turning point in his wonderful career. At this time Monica arrived at Milan and this was the joy that awaited her; her prayer was answered.

So let the Christian mother remember day by day in her prayers at the throne of grace the children that God has given her. They will have their trials and temptations and difficulties to cope with, and these trials and temptations bravely met will help to form the character; they will

have to take their place in the world, they will have their duties to perform, their battles to fight; she must not try to keep them back from these duties, these battles, but she must pray that they may be carried safely through them. That was a beautiful prayer which Christ offered up in behalf of His disciples. It is a prayer that every Christian mother may safely offer up in behalf of her child now. "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Oh, let us not be unbelieving! but with the prayers of faith let us commit our children into His keeping.

Yes! this prayer of faith, a mother's prayer, what marvels has it not wrought! I do believe that many a man to-day looking back on his past life can say and say with thankfulness that if he has been kept from evil, if he has made any way in the Christian life, he owes it all, under God, to a mother's love, a mother's prayers; and if many a prodigal in the far country ere this has come to himself, if a chord within him, after years of impenitence and

hardness of heart has at last been touched, if an irresistible power has laid hold on him, if an irresistible force has thrown him on his knees in tears—it was perhaps the thought of a mother's love.

ADDRESS IV.

PHŒBE, OR THE DISTRICT VISITOR.

"I commend unto you Phœbe our sister, which is a servant of the Church which is at Cenchrea."—ROMANS xvi. 1.

OUR subject this morning is "Phœbe, the servant of the Church." Like Eunice she is one of those less prominent characters of Holy Writ, of whom we are not told much, but what we are told is intensely suggestive; she is like one of those lesser stars in the firmament, which at first are seen very indistinctly, often altogether unnoticed, but when you look more intently or gaze through a telescope you find that these objects, indistinct at first, are very real objects and—may we not say—very necessary to the order and beauty of God's world. The minor characters of scripture, though they do not attract our attention, as some of the more prominent figures, such as St. Peter or St. Paul or St. John do, yet occupy

a very real place in the firmament of the Church, and the Church would be the poorer if they were left out. The Church needs them, and the Church cannot do without them.

One of these characters is Phœbe, the deaconess, or as the word is rendered in our version "the servant of the Church." Let us try and picture to ourselves what Phœbe was, her home, her surroundings, her life, her work. She lived, we are told, in Cenchrea. Cenchrea was the Eastern port of Corinth, situated on the Saronic Gulf, and it was by means of this port that Corinth held communication with the East. In a word Cenchrea was an important seaport town, a busy hive of industry, in which might be seen congregated persons of almost every nationality, speaking almost every language known at that time. Its docks, its wharfs, its warehouses would always be the scene of bustling, active life. Here might be seen merchants transacting their business, sailors passing away the time between their voyages, carpenters and ship-builders busy at work; and here too doubtless might be seen, as is the case still in every such town, those

abodes of misery, in which human beings sunk in the degradation of sin drag on their wretched existence. It was here in this large seaport town, amid its sea-faring population, with its dirty crowded streets, amid its abodes of sin and misery, that Phoebe worked and toiled. It was here that she went in and out, doing the work of a deaconess, telling these poor souls that were intent upon this world only, sunk in sin and following the degrading rites of their abominable superstitions, of a better and brighter world—of those joys which she herself had experienced, of the forgiveness of sins and of the new life in Christ Jesus. Day by day, we may be sure, did she thus bring her influence to bear upon them, endeavouring to impart to them the blessings which she herself had first received. Day by day did she go forth “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” to her daily work, to succour the weak, to comfort the sorrowful, to bind up the broken heart and to point the sinful one to the Saviour.

Dear sisters, this picture is not overdrawn. St. Paul tells us that she was “the succourer of

many." Many in that busy, weary, sin-laden population that made up the seaport town of Cenchrea were made to rejoice through the ministrations of Phœbe; many had reason to bless her; to many a home had she brought comfort, her presence had gladdened many a sad heart and given fresh courage to many a drooping spirit. Nay, more! she had even helped the great Apostle himself. He tells us¹ that she was not only "the succourer of many, but of himself also¹." Some suppose that the Apostle was taken ill at Cenchrea and that Phœbe nursed him through his illness; at any rate we know that he had been at Cenchrea, for after he had left Corinth he set sail from this port for Ephesus, and we can only account for the allusion that is made to Phœbe's ministrations, by supposing that when there he was in some way or other in need of succour, and that he received it at the hands of Phœbe.

And now mark the great honour that is con-

¹ I am indebted for some of the thoughts in this and the next section to recollections of a sermon on "Phœbe," by Dr. Liddon.

ferred on this faithful servant of the Church! St. Paul, when at Corinth, had written one of his most important epistles—his epistle to the Church in Rome, that closely reasoned epistle in which he treats of the great doctrine of Justification. And to whom does he entrust this letter? Who is to be the bearer of it to the Imperial City? On whom is this high honour to be conferred? It is on Phœbe, on her who had done so much for the sea-faring population of Cenchrea, who had worked and toiled for Christ unceasingly in that crowded seaport. *She* is to carry this important letter—this letter that will be read and treasured up, and be the precious inheritance of the Church centuries after the greatness and grandeur of Imperial Rome shall have passed away! Is not this a touching mark of confidence—a grateful tribute of affection, an acknowledgment of benefits received? And ere she sets sail with this precious charge, the Apostle, with that thoughtfulness so characteristic of him, adds a postscript, so to speak, to the letter. He has in his mind the bearer of it, and he bids his friends in Rome receive her and welcome her.

The words are full of deep affection, and though this is the only passage in the whole Bible in which Phœbe is mentioned, there is enough in it to shew us what her life was, what her work was, and how thoroughly that work was appreciated by St. Paul. "I commend unto you Phœbe our sister, which is a servant of the Church, which is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many and of myself also."

I. First then, we see in Phœbe the prototype of all women who are engaged in active work for Christ, she represents those who give up at least some of their time to minister to Him through His suffering and sin-laden members, and so she brings before us *Woman's Work* in one of its aspects, viz. her work *outside* the sphere of her own household and the requirements of her own immediate circle—her work among the poor and the suffering and the weary ones of our large and populous parishes.

Phœbe, as I have already said, is called the

Deaconess of the Church in Cenchrea, and she is the first person in the Bible who is called by that name. The word "succourer¹" used by St. Paul, as it stands in the Greek, leads us to suppose that she was a person of means and occupied a high position; and here we see her using her means to the glory of God, devoting her gifts and her energies to the service of her Saviour, and ministering of her substance to those who were in a humbler sphere of life.

I am not going to draw any deduction from this that Phœbe was actually what is meant by a Deaconess in these days, I mean a person without any household cares and duties, removed from home ties and devoting herself altogether to the service of the Church. She may have been this or she may not, for Scripture is silent on the point: nor am I going to dwell on the subject of Deaconesses in that sense. I will only say in passing that the question of providing trained Deaconesses, not to supersede volunteer helpers but to supplement their efforts, is a question that has of late years come very much to

¹ *προσάρις*, one standing in the front rank; a patroness.

the front, and in parishes where these trained helpers are working they are found to be an immense advantage. I believe that in every large parish two or more earnest, active women, working under the direction of the parish priest, free from all household cares and family duties, at liberty to devote themselves entirely to the work of the Church, to seek out the young, to nurse the sick, to visit the poor, to be continually engaged in doing that kind of work which a woman alone can do, would be of the greatest service, and I am convinced that such an agency, so far from interfering with voluntary effort, would give an additional impetus to it, and make it more definite, more systematic.

But it is not of such an institution as this that I am now speaking: I wish rather to say a few words, with reference to those agencies that we ourselves already possess, with a view to make them, if possible, more real, more thorough, to infuse into them a little more of that spirit which Phœbe carried into her work, and to enlist, if I can, a few more helpers for the same work.

Now there are in every parish persons with more or less leisure time ; they have their household duties, but these household duties do not take up 'all their time, perhaps in some cases only a very small portion of it. What are they to do with the rest? Let me assume that you to whom I write have six hours out of the twelve in each working day, which you can call strictly your own to do just what you like with. You may read useful and edifying books, so as to improve and brace up your mind, or you may read sensational novels and that kind of literature, which only enervates the mind ; you may spend these hours in dawdling over the fire and dreaming away the time, or you may spend them with your friends in discussing your neighbours, talking over their peculiarities and shortcomings, in what is commonly called gossip: you may walk or drive or amuse yourselves in any way that presents itself to you at the time. These are some of the avenues that are open to those who have time on their hands ; but will any venture to say that such pastimes as these, or any of them, are worthy of the whole of their leisure time?

Shall none of this precious time be given to God —this time that He has given us to be used and not abused, shall it be altogether spent on self-seeking and self-pleasing? I am sure you will all agree with me that it *ought* not to be. But do not misunderstand me, I am not proscribing amusements; they have their place, and are necessary and even good for us: I am only pleading for some recognition on our part of the claims which God has upon our time, our talents, our energies. I am only striving to shew that in the arrangement of that time that any of you may have at your disposal, after your home duties have been performed, especially if a large margin is left, some of that margin ought to be given, in definite work, to God.

Well then! how shall you determine in what way it is to be given? People sometimes ask, "What can I do? I am too young or too old or too inexperienced or too diffident or too something, I can do but little; it is of no use my trying to do anything." Dear friends! where there is a will, God will point out the way, but let us take care that we do not fastidiously refuse

what He clearly puts before us; let us be sure that we are ready to take up and carry out to the utmost of our power what He has clearly shewn us we may do for Him, and that we do it not merely because it may chime in with our own wishes, but because it is His will, and "even the cup of cold water given for His sake shall not lose its reward."

Try then and find out honestly and conscientiously how much time in each week you really can give to church work, then ask God to direct you, and seek counsel of your clergyman as to the best way in which you can help on Christ's work in the parish. You may have a vocation for teaching, and he may be sadly in need of a Sunday School Teacher; you may be specially fitted for district visiting, and he may only be too glad to secure your services, or there may be many other ways in which you may help, and in which talents and energies which are frittered away may be turned to good account. I am sure I need not say, how the clergy are often over weighted, and how thankfully they welcome any help that is offered in this way to relieve

them of some of the burden that presses upon them. A clergyman's work now-a-days, in these times (thank God) of revived spiritual life, is so arduous, it is so varied, and so many occupations not strictly ministerial are thrust upon him, that the pressure is often extreme and it is with difficulty that he can get any time at all for reading and study. So you may imagine how welcome any real help in carrying out church work must be. And besides there is work in every parish that can be carried out effectually only by women. I spoke in my last address of some of the miserable homes in our large towns, and I ventured to attribute this state of things in a great measure to the mother's influence, it therefore follows that if we are to raise the home, we must raise the mother; but how can the mother be raised except by female agency? Yes! there is work which a woman can do better than a man, a woman's influence will often tell, where a man has signally failed, and a woman can bring about results which man, do what he may, would in vain try to accomplish. So then you see there is work in the Church of Christ; real, true work

awaiting every woman who has the time and the will and the energy to devote to it—work that will more than repay all her efforts, work in the performance of which she can go forth as Phœbe went to be “the succourer of many,” to act the part of a Deaconess, if not in name, at any rate in deed and in truth.

II. I come now to speak of the way in which that work is to be carried out, and I confine my observations entirely to that branch of Church work which Phœbe—the scripture character that we have to-day before us—may be said most nearly to represent, I mean the District Visitor's work.

Speaking then now especially to District Visitors let me say.

1. Try first of all to grasp the meaning of your work. A district has been assigned to you, let that district be one of your chief thoughts; do not give it a merely subordinate place, but let it have a real, abiding place in your heart. That district is made up of immortal souls, souls for which Christ died, souls for whose salvation He is yearning with all the deep un-

utterable yearning of His heart, you are a messenger from God to this district, you *may* be a messenger of love and peace and joy, but that depends in a great measure on the estimate that you take of your work and the light in which you look at it. Desultory visits, few and far between; short, hurried visits; mere conventional visits will do no good; on the contrary they must do harm, for there is an appearance of unreality about them. The district visitor that is to succeed in her work must take an interest in her district, she must have an object in view, and that object must be to do real good to the souls as well as the bodies of her people. She must not be content with being a mere almoner, a mere dispenser of charity, however necessary that may be. She must enter into the real wants and sorrows and trials of those entrusted to her; she must sympathise with them, she must talk to them kindly and tenderly of higher and better things than the things of this world, she must talk to them of Jesus, lead them to avail themselves of the means of grace and so be unto them in very deed a guide to heaven.

Oh! believe me, our danger, ours as clergy no less than yours as district visitors, lies in this, lest we should get into a kind of groove and let our visits degenerate into mere, formal, conventional calls, instead of being real visits of help and encouragement to those to whom we are sent. Therefore the first advice that I venture to give is this, let your district have a place in your prayers, take an interest in it, think often of the precious souls entrusted to you, remember them, pray for them.

2. The next thing that I would say is this. Try and be systematic and methodical in your visits. It is difficult, I know, *always* to adhere to a plan of visiting, but still a little prearrangement, a little thought, a little self-sacrifice will, I think, generally surmount this difficulty; and do not be discouraged if your first visit to a cottage is not always as readily received as you could wish: as a rule I find that the poor are very glad to see the clergy and district visitors, and are extremely thankful to them for their visits. I have often met with genuine expressions of heartfelt gratitude for spiritual benefits in the

cottages of the poor. But sometimes it happens that you come across persons who receive you coldly, and are rather loth to open the door to you ; do not be discouraged, perhaps it only shews independence of character, and under a rough exterior often may be found a very warm heart. A little patience, perseverance, and tact will do wonders. I remember some years ago when I first went to my last parish, I was visiting from house to house, and I went to one house where there was a lodger ; he was a shoemaker, the people of the house received me very kindly, but the lodger was very uncivil, very rude and gruff. I daresay he looked upon my visit as a mere professional visit, a visit of duty, and thought he would resent it, but I made up my mind I would not be conquered, and I called again ; I called on several occasions, and my friend gradually thawed, he became more amiable, and at last he came to Church. It was with difficulty that he was at first induced to come, but when he once made a beginning he came regularly, and in due time became a communicant, and I do not think I had a firmer friend in the whole parish than that sturdy old shoemaker became.

3. The next rule that I would venture to lay down is this, that in visiting we should always treat the very poorest with the utmost courtesy, regarding them as fellow Christians, as heirs together of the same hope, the same promise of eternal life. We should always make a point of knocking at the door and waiting until we are admitted; we should also take care that our visit is convenient, that we are not intruding. A poor person should be considered in these matters quite as much as others who are higher up in the social scale, and you may be sure that these little courtesies will not be thrown away.

4. Again, we should always be on our guard against indulging in any gossip during our visit. We must not listen to any scandal about the neighbours. The district visitor is to be a peacemaker, and whenever she can is to try and bring together the discordant elements of her district and harmonise them. Her work is the work of bringing souls first of all nearer to Christ, and then nearer to each other in Christ.

5. Again, when you go to visit the cottages of the poor, go with a cheerful face; do not put on

a sad look. One always likes to see the clergyman, the doctor, the district visitor, the nurse, looking bright and cheerful. It is half the battle. The poor have enough to sadden them without our adding to their sadness by wearing a gloomy appearance. They want cheering up, it makes their burden often lighter and easier to bear.

6. Above all, dear sisters, see that you sympathise with them. It is sympathy that wins after all. It was the sympathy of our dear Lord that told on the people of His day. He felt for them. He put His back under their burdens and helped them to bear them. Sympathy, fellow-feeling, fellow-suffering, the sympathetic grasp of the hand when words fail you, the sympathetic look when you seem utterly powerless to do anything else. Ah! it may not be in vain; it may help many an aching heart to bear up, many a drooping spirit to take courage and make a fresh start.

III. But before I close, I must guard against a feeling that comes sometimes over workers in the Church of Jesus; I mean a feeling of despondency, and sometimes this feeling is very crush-

ing. We have all, I have no doubt, more or less felt it. We imagine we see no result of our labours, nothing to shew for our efforts, and "we grow weary in well doing." Now why does this feeling come? It is often, I am afraid, through want of faith. We look for the harvest almost as soon as we have sown the seed; we do not sufficiently leave the results with God, knowing that it is ours to work, ours to do the Master's will and to carry out His commands, His to prosper, His to bless; but He will do it in His own way and at His own time, *when* He will and *as* He will. Sometimes we are permitted to see results above our expectations. These are no doubt intended to encourage and strengthen us for fresh efforts; they appear to us very often when we are desponding. At other times we seem to be making no way; may not this be to try our faith, to deepen in us a sense of our own insufficiency, our own weakness, our own manifold shortcomings? Still we may be sure of this that our efforts, however imperfect they may be, if honestly and sincerely made, in dependence on God's strength, will not be in vain. I was struck the other day

with what happened to me—and I mention this not only to shew how God wonderfully encourages us, but also as enforcing what I have already said about the gratitude of the poor for spiritual blessings. Some three years ago I conducted a mission in one of the large towns of this country. Last week again I was preaching in the same town, but not in the same church; still a large number of my mission congregation were present, and when the service was over, I found a great many waiting in the porch to shake me by the hand, and among them a poor woman who gave me such a warm grasp as she said—and the words seemed to come from the bottom of her heart—“Oh, sir, I do so thank you for what you have done for my home.” Of course it was not I, but the grace of God that did it, but her thankfulness was very real. I easily recalled to myself the circumstances. It was an intemperate husband brought to God at the time of the mission, and everything had been so different ever since. Surely, a true cause for thankfulness!

But, dear friends, whether we see any fruit of our labours here or not, we may be sure of this

that no work done for Christ, in the spirit of Christianity, will be unvalued by Him. There is not a single effort that you make from a pure and true motive, in His name and for His sake, that will not bring forth fruit. You may not see the result here. You can only "sow your seed in the morning, and in the evening withhold not your hand." The day of judgment will reveal the harvest, and as the golden sheaves of that great ingathering are stored in the heavenly garner, you will then see, as you could never have thoroughly seen before, that "your labour has not been in vain in the Lord."

ADDRESS V.

THE VIRGIN MARY, OR TRUE BLESSEDNESS.

"Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."—ST. LUKE i. 48.

WE have already, in the course of these addresses, dwelt on four of the women of Holy Scripture, and we have tried to fix our thoughts on some of those distinctive features that marked their lives. Thus we saw decision exemplified in the beautiful and touching story of Ruth. In Martha we had a picture of over-carefulness and over-anxiety. In Eunice, the mother, we saw the influence of women *within* the sphere of her own household, and Phœbe the deaconess has shown us her influence and work *outside* that sphere.

To-day I close this series of addresses by bringing before you for contemplation *the* woman of all

others whom truly to contemplate is to revere. She stands alone among the women of the earth. She occupies a position that is unique in the history of the world—the most illustrious of all her sex “whom all generations shall call blessed”—Mary, the maiden of Nazareth; Mary, the mother of our Lord. I ask you this morning to dwell with me on this lovely character in order that, by God's help, we may learn some lessons from it.

I. But first of all let me say that in dwelling upon the character of the Blessed Virgin, there are two errors to be avoided.

On the one hand there is the error of the Roman Church—what is called Mariolatry, i.e. the exaltation of Mary to a position that no created being can occupy, a position scarcely inferior to that of Christ Himself, the appealing to her to bring her influence to bear on her son, as though He needed thus influencing, as though any one could be more tender, more compassionate, more truly sympathetic than that Allmerciful High Priest Who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” having been “tempted

in all things as we are," "bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh."

On the other hand there is the opposite error, which is doubtless a reaction, a recoil from this undue exaltation of the Blessed Virgin, I mean the error of the puritanical school of thought, which, by a kind of rebound, throws itself into the opposite extreme, and, almost dreading the very mention of her name, seems to deny to her the respect which is surely due to her and which is claimed for her in Holy Scripture.

Between these two extremes the Church of England steers a middle course. Here as in other matters she adheres to what is primitive and catholic, protesting against all tampering with "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints," whether it be on the one hand by the modern additions of Romanism, or on the other by the diluting process of Puritanism.

The Church to which we belong assigns to the Blessed Virgin her true place among the saints of God. She observes two Festivals in memory of her, the Festival of the Annunciation, and the Festival of the Purification, but we cannot forget

that in both these Festivals the primary thought is of our Blessed Lord Himself, as though the Church would teach us that whatever honour we pay to the Virgin Mary, we pay it on account of the close connection that exists between her and Christ, that it is all derived from Him, that the light which shines from her is not her own light, but the light of Him the Sun of Righteousness received by her and reflected on the world. And surely to have been selected from among all the millions of women to be the channel through which God accomplished His wonderful purpose for the salvation of the world—that purpose darkly foreshadowed in Eden, gradually unfolded by type, by prophecy, by symbol through the long vista of four thousand years—to have been selected as *the* one of all others to be the instrument of the Incarnation, the channel through which Christ came “who is over all God blessed for ever;” to have nursed the Infant Redeemer, to have listened to His first words, to have watched Him grow from infancy to boyhood, from boyhood to manhood, and as He grew in stature growing also “in wisdom and in favour with

God and man," surely this must have been a high honour indeed. And the Church, which is the Body mystical of Christ, does well to assign a distinguished place in her calendar of saints to her whom God thus deigned so signally to favour, and whom the Son of God so tenderly loved.

Shrink we not then, because the Blessed Virgin has by one branch of the Church Catholic been unduly exalted, because she has been placed in a higher niche than that assigned to her in the Word of God, because the Church of Rome has added new dogmas to "the faith once for all delivered to the saints,"—shrink we not from claiming for her that place which is especially hers, shrink we not from speaking of her with that reverential love which belongs to one so highly favoured, whom God Himself honoured, and of whom it is said that all generations should call her blessed.

But while we thus think of her and speak of her, let us ask what it was that gave her this blessedness, also whether we may not be partakers of the same blessedness, and if so, in what way?

For we must remember that while the Blessed Virgin occupied a position which was peculiarly her own, yet there is a sense in which others as well may partake of her beatitude. We must not forget how on a certain occasion, when "a woman of the company lifted up her voice and said, 'Blessed is the womb that bare Thee and the paps which Thou hast sucked,'" Christ replied that there was a higher blessedness even than this; and how on another occasion, when He was told that His mother and His brethren were standing without desiring to speak with Him, He spake of a relationship that is higher still. Nay! it was the being united to Christ in this higher relationship, that gave to Mary her exalted position. It was not merely the fact that she was the mother of our Lord according to the flesh, but it was the fact that she possessed pre-eminently those virtues and graces, those noble qualities which rendered her fit for such a high position; it was this that chiefly constituted her blessedness. Blessed indeed in being the Lord's mother, and in this respect she stands alone, but blessed, yea rather more blessed, in that

“she heard the Word of God and kept it,” and in this respect we may all strive to follow her example.

II. We come then now to consider what those special virtues were that shone forth in the Virgin Mary, those graces and characteristics that give such beauty to our conception of her saintliness.

1. First of all there was the grace of *humility*. Mary's life was a very humble life, a quiet, secluded life, lived in the little town of Nazareth; her home was a very poor and a very lowly one. Though she was descended from a noble tribe, though she came from a royal house and was of royal lineage—the tribe of Judah, the house and lineage of David—yet her condition was one of great poverty, and this poverty of her outward life had its counterpart in her deep, inward poverty of spirit. Read that beautiful *Magnificat*, Mary's hymn, which we sing so often, and what is the burden of that hymn throughout from beginning to end? It is the greatness of God and her own littleness, the marvellous condescension of “the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity,”

in stooping so low to visit one so poor and so humble as she was. Yes! read all that is said in the Gospels of Mary the maiden of Nazareth, and you cannot fail to see shining forth again and again with unearthly lustre throughout her life the grace of humility.

Humility, what a beautiful virtue it is! and yet how difficult to acquire! How easy it is to mistake it! There are so many spurious imitations of it; there is so much dissimulation in the world that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a mock humility and the genuine virtue. It is so necessary that the motive be the right one. True humility consists not merely in *appearing* lowly to others, it is the *being* lowly, lowly in one's own estimation, lowly in heart. It may be said of true humility that it is the very foundation of the spiritual life; an edifice, that is to rise to any height, to any eminence at all, must first of all have its foundations laid low in the ground, deep and well; the tree that is to stand the buffetings of the storm must strike its roots downwards, and if the spiritual life is to grow and flourish, the foundations must be laid in the

depths of self abasement. Dear friends, how can it be otherwise! Nothing in ourselves, all our sufficiency coming from God, how can we be otherwise than humble? Do we compare ourselves with others? Do we imagine ourselves better than they? Well, suppose that it is so! what have we that we have not received? Take our temporal blessings, our life, health, strength, our worldly advantages, whence come they? Ah, we *cannot* ignore God! Who is it that has preserved us in health? Who is it that has given us these things to enjoy? must we not answer, and answer with deep thankfulness—GOD.

To be humble is to recognize these things, to recognize what God is and what we are. But how much more is there need of humility, when we consider the depths of spiritual degradation, from which we have been raised through the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we “look to the rock whence we are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we are digged,” when we consider even now as we toil upwards how feeble and faltering our footsteps are, how often

we trip and fall on the way, how very far off we still are from the goal, when we consider these things, how can we be otherwise than humble? Surely there is no room for pride in the spiritual life; "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Even the most advanced Christian must walk very circumspectly. Man at his best is liable to failures, sometimes like the adventurous climber, all but reaching the mountain peak, and then perhaps in a moment losing his footing, falling back and with difficulty regaining the position he has lost. Yes! humility is the only garb that befits weak and erring mortals such as we are. When we consider how much better than we many would have been if they had only had our advantages, and how low we might have sunk, if we had had to cope with the temptations and the pitfalls that have beset others; when we think of what we might have been, what we may yet become through our own carelessness, we may well pray again and again in the words of that beautiful hymn which we sometimes sing

“O Great Absolver, grant my soul may wear
The lowliest garb of penitence and prayer.”

Dear friends! let us seek humility. It was the humility of Mary that was one of the factors constituting her blessedness. It is to the humble that God looks, “He hath regarded the lowliness of his hand-maiden.” “He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek.” “Thus saith the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” Even our Blessed Lord Himself was exalted in His human nature as the result and reward of His wondrous humiliation, and His exhortation to-day is—“He that would come after Me, must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.” The way to the crown is the way of the cross and “before honour is humility.”

2. Again there was in the Blessed Virgin a wonderful *simplicity* of character, a deep purity of heart with that simple, unaffected, guileless demeanour, so rare yet so beautiful.

Simplicity, to appear what we are! The simplicity of a little child, whose character has not as yet been spoiled and made unreal by the conventionalities of the world! Simplicity in our words. Oh! how sadly does the want of simplicity here tell on human society. If we were to try and get to the root of those sins that are called sins of the tongue, we should find that very many of them must altogether be attributed to a want of simplicity; boastful words, words of exaggeration and many more flow from this source. We want to appear different from what we are, and so duplicity comes in, we use exaggerated language, the life becomes untrue, unreal, a sham.

Simplicity, again, in dress and demeanour. Oh! I do think that if there is one department above all others in which the women of the present day have need to reform, it is in the department of dress! Be sure, that of all qualities in a woman, there is none more beautiful than simple, unaffected modesty, and the dress and demeanour should always be in keeping with this; let what is worn be good, no-

thing false, nothing unreal about it, but let it be the outward expression of that inward temper which is so lovely to behold—"the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is, in the sight of God, of great price." And then, again, in this matter of dress it is so dreadful to think that such enormous sums are so often spent upon it, spent upon merely decking the body—this body which in a few years will only have some six feet of earth that it can call its own—while it is so difficult to get money to carry on God's work; while souls are perishing and the needful help not forthcoming. I do not think that I am exaggerating when I say that there are many ladies who spend every year some scores, nay, some hundreds of pounds on their own person, while their contributions to God's treasury may be reckoned by a few shillings. Oh! I do think it is so sad, and all the time the work of the church languishing through lack of funds. Dear friends! may God give us all a truer simplicity, make us more real more self-denying that we may thus attain to the blessedness of Mary, the Lord's Mother.

3. Again, another thing that contributed to her blessedness was her wonderful faith. "Blessed is she that believed." Mary believed and "all generations call her blessed." Faith, what is it? It is to take God at His word, it is to rest the soul on Him, to trust Him, to surrender the whole being, body, soul and spirit, to His keeping. "Be it unto me according to thy word;"—that was the response of Mary to the angelic communication. Dear friends! a person strong in faith is one who can rise above the poor paltry objects of this earth and "endure as seeing Him who is invisible." What was it that enabled Paul and Silas in the Philippian prison, laden as they were with chains, lacerated as their bodies were with the scourging they had undergone, to sing praises to God at the midnight hour? It was Faith. What was it that nerved Paul the aged when about to face the axe of the Roman executioner, to cry out, "I have fought a good fight, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness"? It was Faith. Faith has again and again supported men under the most trying circumstances and brought them forth

“more than conquerors.” Faith enabled Abram to follow God’s leading, though he knew not whither. Faith enabled Moses to hold fast by God amid the “wisdom” and sensuality of Egypt. The dying Stephen was supported by faith, and the martyrs of the amphitheatre went to meet the lions strong in Faith. Its cry ever is “Be it unto me according to Thy word.”

Oh, dear friends! if we would do the will of God, if we would be blessed as Mary, believe me, there must be in us the qualifications that Mary possessed. There must be humility, there must be simplicity, there must be Faith. Humility, that God may dwell in us; Simplicity, that we may be true children of God; Faith, that God’s voice may be heard and obeyed. Oh, how beautiful must such a life as this be! the life of God in the soul:—“I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me.”

I now bring these addresses to a close. We have dwelt together on some of the special aspects of woman’s life, and we are I trust the better for having thus dwelt upon them. Dear sisters! if the lessons that we have thus

learnt have made a real impression upon us, surely that impression will be seen in our nearness to Jesus now and from henceforth. Remember it was nearness to Jesus, by a life of humility, simplicity, and faith, that constituted the blessedness of Mary, and this blessedness may be yours. Be near therefore to Him at all times, near to Him in the quiet of your chamber, near Him amid the distractions of the world. Above all be near Him through the week of His Passion; near Him in the Agony of Gethsemane; near Him in the gloom of Calvary. Thus learn to look to Him for all things. Thus "run the race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus"—looking unto Him as your exemplar, looking unto Him for strength. In every sorrow looking unto Jesus. In every joy looking unto Jesus. "When Satan comes in like a flood," looking unto Jesus. When the waves of this troublesome world rise high, looking unto Jesus. And, dear sisters, when you come to the end of this life's journey, when "earth's joys grow dim," "when other helpers fail and comforts flee," oh, then! may

you be seen looking unto Jesus, then may He be found near you, nearer than any earthly being possibly can be—the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Amen.

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